IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend claims 3-10, 12, 19-23, 28, and 33-37.

3. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to claim 1 [or 2], wherein the 5'-untranslated region comprises a sequence corresponding to a region selected from the group consisting of BoxA, BoxB, a trans factor-binding site, and a combination thereof.

4. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 3] claim 1, wherein the 5'-untranslated region further comprises an AUG or ATG sequence.

5. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 4] claim 1, wherein the 5'-untranslated region comprises a part of or an entire region of IRES (internal ribosomal entry site) of viral mRNA.

6. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 5] claim 1 further comprises a portion of a coding region adjacent to the 5'-untranslated region, or a fragment or a variant thereof, of a viral gene in addition to said nucleic acid sequence.

7. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 6] claim 1, wherein said nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene is incorporated downstream of an expression regulation promoter sequence and upstream of the useful gene in a gene expression vector.

8. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 7] claim 1, wherein said nucleic acid is a cDNA sequence.

9. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 8] claim 1, wherein said gene expression vector is a vector for expression in eukaryotic cells.

10. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 9] claim 1, wherein said virus is RNA virus.

12. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to claims 10, wherein said virus is HCV (hepatitis C) virus.

19. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 3 to 18] claim 3, wherein said nucleic acid comprises a sequence having substitution, deletion, insertion and/or addition of a single or a few nucleotides of a sequence derived from a wild-type virus within the sequence or a proximate sequence in at least one position corresponding to a pyrimidine-rich tract, BoxA, BoxB and/or trans factor-binding site contained in the 5'-untranslated region.

20. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 19] claim 1, wherein said nucleic acid comprises a sequence having substitution, deletion, insertion and/or addition of a single or a few nucleotides of a sequence derived from a wild-type virus within the sequence corresponding to a region other than the 5'-untranslated region.

21. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to claim 15[, 16, 17 or 18], wherein said nucleic acid has one thymidine inserted into position 207 of SEQ ID NO: 1.

22. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 21] claim 1, wherein said nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene enhances expression of a useful gene by means of its own translation promoting activity.

23. (Amended) The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 22] claim 1, wherein said nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene enhances expression of a useful gene by means of accelerating IRES activity.

28. (Amended) A gene expression vector comprising the nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 25] claim 1.

33. (Amended) A probe for screening substances that interact with IRES, comprising the polynucleotide according to claim 26 [or 27].

34. (Amended) A probe for screening IRES-dependent translation initiators, comprising the polynucleotide according to claim 26 [or 27].

35. (Amended) A therapeutic composition for treating diseases resulting from reduction of cap-dependent mRNA translation in a body of organisms, comprising the nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to [any one of claims 1 to 25] claim 1 such that translation of mRNA can be promoted by means of introducing said nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene into the body of the organisms.

36. (Amended) A therapeutic composition for treating diseases resulting from reduction of IRES activity in a body of organisms, comprising the nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to claim 24 [or 25] such that translation of mRNA can be promoted by means of introducing said nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene into the body of the organisms.

37. (Amended) A method for determining the severity of hepatitis C, comprising the steps of: detecting the presence of a target polynucleotide sequence contained in a biological sample derived from a test subject, by using the polynucleotide according to claim 26 [or 27] as the target; and determining the severity of the hepatitis C based on the presence of the sequence.

Please add following new claims 38-43.

38. The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to claim 16, wherein said nucleic acid has one thymidine inserted into position 207 of SEQ ID NO: 1.

39. The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to

claim 17, wherein said nucleic acid has one thymidine inserted into position 207 of SEQ ID NO: 1.

40. The nucleic acid sequence for enhancing expression of a useful gene according to claim 18, wherein said nucleic acid has one thymidine inserted into position 207 of SEQ ID NO: 1.

41. A probe for screening substances that interact with IRES, comprising the polynucleotide according to claim 27.

42. A probe for screening IRES-dependent translation initiators, comprising the polynucleotide according to claim 27.

43. A method for determining the severity of hepatitis C, comprising the steps of: detecting the presence of a target polynucleotide sequence contained in a biological sample derived from a test subject, by using the polynucleotide according to claim 27 as the target; and determining the severity of the hepatitis C based on the presence of the sequence.